

TRAVEL

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John Kennedy exhibit relives day in Dallas

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DALLAS — Visitors come by the hundreds each Nov. 22 to stand in Dealey Plaza, to pay homage to a president felled in his prime by a sniper's bullet.

They retrace the motorcade route, walk around the grassy knoll, leave flowers on a memorial a block away and peer eerily up from the street to the sixth-floor corner window where Lee Harvey Oswald allegedly aimed the gun at John Fitzgerald Kennedy 26 years ago.

Last year, on the 25th anniversary of the death of JFK, someone also threw a blood-red rose into the air at the site of the shooting.

street, at the site of the shooting.

"It stopped traffic," recalled Cosy McLemore of the Dallas County Historical Foundation. People wouldn't run over it, they went around it. The mounted police were there, although there was no disruption. There was a very indescribable mood."

Last year, filmmakers were also there, interviewing people and gathering footage for a film that is now part of a newly opened exhibit called "The Sixth Floor." Located on the sixth floor of the former Texas School Book Depository, the educational and historical exhibit examines the life, death and legacy of JFK.

It's a vivid history lesson for those too young to have known, and a reminder of a long-past era for those who lived through it.

"The Sixth Floor" opened on President's Day this year, and so far, some 230,000 people have visited, said McLemore, a consultant for the exhibit and its director of public programs.

More than 400 photographs, six documentary films and interpretive displays are contained in the emotionally moving exhibit, which cost some \$3.5 million and represents 10 years of research and planning. The Kennedy family was not asked to participate in the exhibit, said McLemore. "We didn't think it was very appropriate," she said. "They have had so many tragedies."

Eight years after the assassination, the school-book depository left the property and the owner unsuccessfully tried to raise money to convert it into a JFK museum. Dallas County bought the dilapidated structure in 1977 and converted it — except the sixth floor — into county office space.

The sixth floor remained closed to the public through the years, although visitors had expressed interest in seeing it. Two important areas — the corner window and the staircase where the alleged assassin's rifle and clipboard were found — have been preserved and are now behind glass.

The rest of the exhibit contains photographs — many of them famous — and films that place the events of the time in context: "The Early '60s," "The Trip to Texas," "The Crisis Hours," "The Investigations," "The Legacy," "Who Did It?" and more. One film shows the funeral with no narration, just music and the tearful face of the nation. Another film features Walter Cronkite, who recalls making the announcement of Kennedy's death on national TV.

The exhibit ends with several books in which visitors can record their thoughts about what they have just seen.

When filled up, the books are saved, catalogued and stored in archives on the fifth floor of the building. "They are available for researchers to come look at," said McLemore. "It would make an interesting subject for anyone doing psychological research. Some people write the most beautiful things — some even write poetry."

Many people feel compelled to write personal comments.

"I remember," one wrote.

"I was there," some wrote.

"I shook his hand," another wrote.

"Still missed, still remembered, still loved," wrote a woman from Texas.

"Why?" asked many.

THE FACTS

■ **What:** "The Sixth Floor."

■ **Where:** Dallas County Administration Building, formerly the Texas School Book Depository, 411 Elm St.

■ **When:** Open Monday through Thursday from 9:30 a.m. to 6 p.m.; 9:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. Friday through Sunday. Open all holidays except Christmas Day.

■ **How much:** Admission and audio tour tickets are \$6 for adults, \$5 for seniors and \$4 for students 6-18.

ies. Admission without audio is \$4, \$3 and \$3, respectively.